



RESEARCHUPDATE

BUTLER CENTER FOR RESEARCH APRIL 2011



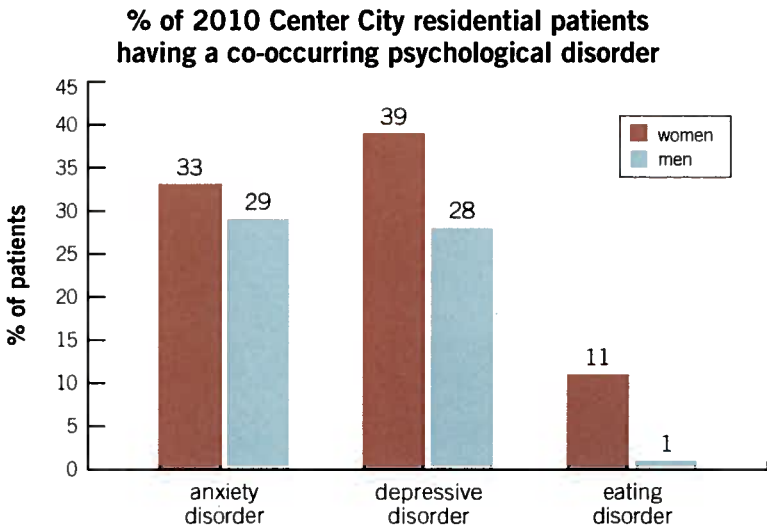
Research Update is published by the Butler Center for Research to share significant scientific findings from the field of addiction treatment research.

Women and Substance Abuse

For many decades, alcohol and drug dependence were thought to be primarily male issues. Though the prevalence of substance abuse and substance dependence is higher among men than women, a substantial number of women meet dependence criteria. According to the most recent survey from the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA), over 6% of women in the United States met criteria for substance dependence in 2009. This equates to millions of women affected by these disorders at some point in their lives¹.

A great deal of research suggests that women differ from men in a number of areas relating to alcohol and drug use. One difference pertains to women's biological and subjective responses to these substances. For example, studies of cocaine use indicate that women initiate cocaine use sooner than men and become addicted to cocaine more quickly². The differences are even more pronounced for alcohol. Women's bodies do not process alcohol as quickly as men and as a result they are more likely to become intoxicated on lower doses of alcohol³. Women who drink heavily also face greater health risks compared to men, including cirrhosis, heart damage⁴, and brain damage⁵. Research also suggests that once women begin to drink regularly, they progress to alcohol dependence more quickly than men⁶. Despite the fact that women typically drink alcohol in lower quantities and less often than men, when they enter treatment their substance use severity and adverse consequences of use are generally equivalent to men⁷.

Another reality faced by women with substance use disorders is the presence of another mental health condition. The Butler Center for Research at Hazelden recently compiled data on female patients receiving residential treatment at our Center City location in 2010. The percentage of these patients having at least one other mental disorder in addition to substance dependence was 82%, as compared to 68% of males admitted to the same program. The graph below shows the percentage of female patients having different types of disorders and compares their rates to those of male patients admitted to the same program:



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THE HAZELDEN EXPERIENCE

In 2007, Hazelden opened a Women's Recovery Center at its Center City, Minnesota campus. As part of residential treatment, women live onsite with other women and participate in women-focused groups and activities. Treatment programming focuses on issues specific to women.

The existence of the Women's Recovery Center has allowed Hazelden to treat more women with addiction and deliver on its mission of helping to restore hope, healing, and health to people affected by addiction to alcohol and other drugs. From 2004 to 2006, Hazelden provided residential treatment to 2,173 women; from 2007 to 2009 2,577 women received treatment.

CONTROVERSIES & QUESTIONS

Question: *With its emphasis on powerlessness and male-oriented language, is Alcoholics Anonymous helpful for women in recovery?*

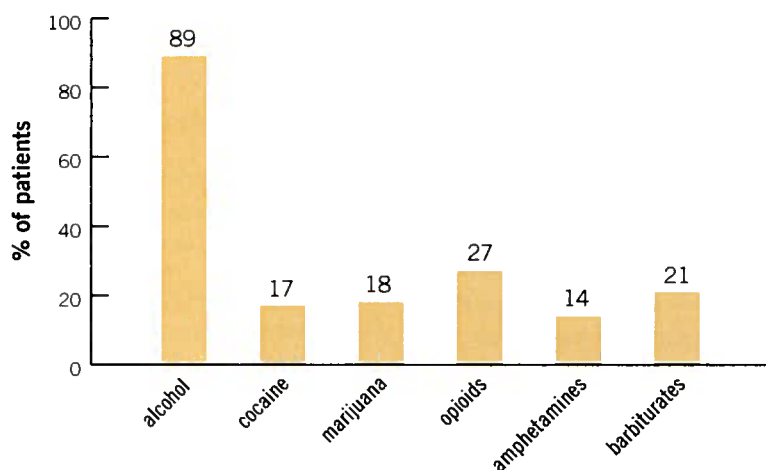
Response: Many research studies show that women engage with Alcoholics Anonymous and other Twelve Step fellowships, particularly after receiving Twelve Step-based residential treatment⁸. Studies also show that both women and men who affiliate with these fellowships are more likely to have positive substance use outcomes after treatment than people who do not affiliate⁹. Though many people believe that the historically male-orientation of AA discourages women from becoming involved, this is not supported by the data. In its 2007 membership survey, AA World Services reported that 33% of its current members were women.

These data are consistent with other research studies and show that women with substance use disorders are more likely than men to have a co-occurring mood or eating disorder. The high rate of co-occurring disorders among women has a number of implications for treatment. Because the presence of another disorder can complicate the course of substance dependence treatment and recovery in women, simultaneous treatment of both disorders is critical for women to achieve long term success". Some studies suggest that the presence of a co-occurring disorder may act as a barrier to receiving alcohol/drug treatment, because women may perceive their problems as being due solely to their mental health condition and may seek treatment in mental health rather than substance dependence programs".

In addition to a co-occurring psychological disorder, women receiving treatment for substance dependence often have a number of other clinical characteristics that may impact the treatment and recovery process. For example, among women receiving residential treatment at Hazelden Center City in 2010, 25% reported at least one previous inpatient treatment episode for mental health issues and over 75% reported receiving mental health treatment on an outpatient basis. In addition, 19% reported at least one prior incident of sexual abuse and 13% reported at least one prior occurrence of intentional self-injurious behavior (such as cutting). Regarding substance use severity, 58% of women reported at least one previous alcohol/drug treatment episode, with 15% of these patients having three or more previous treatment episodes.

The majority of women who seek addiction treatment do so for dependence on alcohol; the rate of dependence on other drugs is typically much lower. The following graph of women receiving residential treatment at Hazelden in 2010 shows the percentage of women having a particular substance dependence diagnosis:

Substance dependence diagnoses for women attending residential treatment at Center City in 2010



The pattern of dependence diagnoses among Hazelden patients is similar to that reported in research studies and by other agencies such as SAMHSA and shows that alcohol dependence is the most common dependence diagnosis among women attending treatment. However, it is important to note that many women who have a primary diagnosis of alcohol dependence are also dependent on at least one other drug. Among women receiving residential treatment at Hazelden in 2010, 42% were dependent on both alcohol and at least one other drug.

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The Butler Center for Research is dedicated to improving recovery from addiction by conducting clinical and institutional research, collaborating with other research centers, and communicating scientific findings.

Audrey Klein, Ph.D., Director

If you have questions, or would like to request copies of Research Update, please call 651-213-4405, email butlerresearch@hazelden.org, or write BC 4, P.O. Box 11, Center City, MN 55012-0011.

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